

ASHMOLEAN

MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

**THINK
OF THE
POSSIBLE...**



**Imaginative Education in action in
museums and heritage settings**

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THINK OF THE POSSIBLE...

Mind-mapping exercise (Stage I of Framework)

Wonder of spring – amazing detail. Romance of ancient story.

Cold dark underworld vs radiant spring on earth. Extremes of climate and weather today.

Sandys celebrated as a draughtsman, but never made it as a painter. On periphery of movement – why? Argument with Rossetti?

Goddess: power to transform, resilient. Artist: attention to detail, concentration, determination, collaboration, hard work, imagination, meticulousness, teamwork.

Dedication on frame of painting: given to museum by Captain R Langton Douglas in memory of son killed in 1916.

Proserpina story – annual release from the underworld bringing spring with her. Story of the seasons. Sandys' lively personal story.

Drama of story/seasons: Hero/Villain, Joy/Sorrow, Life/Death, End/Renew, Create/Destroy, Linear/Cyclic, Hot/Cold, Liberty/Oppression.

Light/Dark creates dramatic tension: shadow and light. Relevant to current climate change crisis? Can we take cycle of seasons for granted?

Gentle Spring

Exhibited at Royal Academy in 1865
Artist: Fredrick Sandys (1829–1904)



Sandys linked to Pre-Raphaelite movement. Rebels – intent on breaking the rules of the Royal Academy. Pre-Raphaelite fantasy woman – problematic from today's feminist perspective.


Or, as 'second phase' Pre-Raphaelite artist was Sandys just 'conforming' to established ideals?

Artistic collaboration/network. Sandys inspired by close friendship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti (they later fell out). Sandys' sister Emma also artist. Painted in garden of poet and novelist George Meredith and exhibited with friend Charles Algernon Swinburne's sonnet.

Joy, hope: promise of spring. Love of nature. Hint of sadness/anxiety: winter will return (dark shadows, poppies symbols of sleep and death). Hyper-realistic style of painting. Virtuoso skill.

Why does it matter?

- ✓ Vivid example of rebellious Pre-Raphaelite artistic skill and ideals
- ✓ Poignancy and relevance of myth of Proserpina and theme of changes in the seasons



Who cares?

This visitor comment encapsulates the ongoing challenge that many museums face – how do we interpret our collections and make them relevant in ways that grab visitors emotionally? And why *should* they care? Finding ways to engage the hearts and minds of visitors is essential if meaningful and memorable learning is to take place.

*Post it note left by visitor, as part of exhibition evaluation project, Helsinki City Museum, 2017**

Imaginative Education (IE) underpins the design of learning experiences which can achieve this kind of emotional engagement. The theory and practice of IE was developed by educational philosopher Kieran Egan, originally for use in schools, but is equally applicable to museum and heritage settings. It reveals and brings together a range of appealing and engaging ways into learning and meaning-making, using cognitive or 'learning tools' that are broadly familiar, as they operate in all sorts of learning and cultural contexts. IE articulates within a strong, coherent and theorised framework what we know intuitively makes learning engaging and memorable, combining a compelling rationale with practical tools.

This Guide and accompanying Framework make a case for an 'IE way of thinking' in a museum and heritage context. 'Think of the Possible' will explore the relationship between the imagination and learning and how it applies to museum interpretation, and provide a summary of IE theory. It will then translate IE learning tools and frameworks into a 4 stage Framework applicable to the design of museum and heritage learning experiences (such as led sessions, self-guided activities and exhibitions), and conclude with two case studies.

Use of this Framework will act as a filter to ensure that opportunities for imaginative and emotional engagement are not missed, making it distinct from, but compatible with, other museum learning theories, models and frameworks. It has been designed to be flexible enough to be applied pragmatically to any heritage content, in any setting, with any audience. It can be 'cherry picked', experimented with and adapted as required.

In association with CIRCE, the Centre for Imagination in Research, Culture and Education based at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, a further aim is to contribute to the discussion about the role of the imagination in museum and heritage settings. For IE inspired practical exercises, information about getting involved, and links to CIRCE and IE resources, please see back page.

The imagination and learning

'It is the ability to *think of the possible*, not just the actual; it is the source of invention, novelty, and flexibility in human thinking; imagination is not distinct from rationality but is rather a capacity that greatly enriches rational thinking; it is tied to our ability to form images in the mind, and image-forming commonly involves emotions' Kieran Egan

Egan's definition of the imagination involves knowledge, psychology and emotion all working together. He argues that imagination can be the 'workhorse of effective learning' – if we harness it successfully. Knowledge only comes to life when it is presented in the context of human emotions via imaginative engagement:

'All knowledge is human knowledge; it grows out of human hopes, fears, and passions. Imaginative engagement with knowledge comes from learning in the context of the hopes, fears, and passions from which it has grown or in which it finds a living meaning' Kieran Egan

The importance of humanising knowledge has a particular resonance in the context of museum and heritage interpretation. Objects enclosed in cases and hanging on walls are divorced from the places and cultures in which they were used and the people who created and cared for them. This makes their humanity difficult to access. Intangible heritage (e.g., performing arts and digital heritage) and historic spaces are equally at risk. IE helps to unpack and illuminate the humanity inherent in all kinds of heritage.

IE theory

IE defines sets of learning tools connected to language development that help us to make sense of the world in distinctly different ways. In order to realise the power of the imagination, these toolkits must work in conjunction *with each other* to enable effective and meaningful learning.

* From 'Helsinki City Museum – Putting the visitor first in a community space for all', Adam Murphy, Sep 2017, www.advisor.museumsandheritage.com

SETS OF IE LEARNING TOOLKITS

Tools of the Body Pre-language body based tools enable us to make sense of the world through our bodies	Tools of Orality The tools we gain through oral language, as we hear and use it in our communities	Tools of Literacy Learning to read and write shapes new ways of understanding the world	Tools of Theoretical Thinking Tools which enable us to understand abstract ideas and theory	Tools of Irony The tools we need to develop a multi-layered, highly reflexive and often contradictory understanding of the world
<p>*Explore bodily senses (touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Explore emotional attachments and responses *Draw out humour and silliness *Involve play *Explore musicality, rhythm and patterns *Use the element of surprise *Communicate with gestures and movement 	<p>*Find the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Find a source of dramatic tension (explore abstract binary opposites) *Evoke mental images with words *Find the fun (jokes and humour) *Adopt a playful approach *Use rhyme, rhythm and pattern in language and numbers *Use metaphors *Identify the unknown (puzzles and mystery) 	<p>*Humanise knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Identify heroic qualities *Find the romance *Stimulate wonder *Reveal the rebel *Illuminate limits of reality and extremes of experience *Change the context *Consider the collector in everyone *Play with visual formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Stimulate a sense of agency *Explore abstract ideas *Employ a meta-narrative structure *Introduce general schemes and their anomalies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Understand the limits of language *Accept ambiguity *Enjoy and notice humour, particularly the Absurd *Develop resilience in an uncertain world *Recognise and use all IE tools flexibly in appropriate contexts

Adapted from Egan's original tools outlined in *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding* (1997) and *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching* (2005) both by Kieran Egan.

See www.educationthatinspires.ca/tips-for-imaginative-educators for more information about IE tools.

IE tools translated into interpretative approaches

Three IE learning toolkits have particular relevance to museum learning and interpretation: **Tools of the Body**, **Tools of Orality** and **Tools of Literacy**.

They have the potential to engage the widest possible audience, and have inspired **three sets of interrelating interpretative approaches named after key IE tools:**

Find the story, **Humanise knowledge** and **Explore bodily senses**. These tools represent the 'guiding principles' of IE inspired interpretation translated into a museum and heritage context. Each interpretative approach within each set derives from an existing IE tool (see Stage 2 of the Framework, p.8).

1. STORIFY: Tools of Orality

Story is a powerful learning tool – we think, construct meaning, and remember in story form. Museums are repositories of stories and are made for storytelling. This set of interpretative approaches reflects the kaleidoscopic nature of story, and its potential to engage visitors in different ways, using story form and the ingredients of story. The term 'storify' refers to this process.

2. HUMANISE (AND SURPRISE?): Tools of Literacy

Bringing content to life in human terms is imperative. This set of approaches draws out human, emotional and heroic associations – human experience expressed on an epic scale.

3. ENGAGE THROUGH THE BODY: Tools of the Body

This set of approaches unlocks our emotional responses to heritage as experienced through the body, particularly necessary in museums where visitors can see but often can't touch.

Tools of Theoretical Thinking and Tools of Irony are also relevant, particularly Accept ambiguity and Stimulate a sense of agency, but they are less immediately accessible.

Using the Framework

The Framework is essentially a *thought exercise* providing practitioners and co-creators with a structured approach to interrogate heritage content (object, collection, historic space, or intangible heritage) from an emotional and imaginative perspective, enabling the design of engaging learning experiences.

This **four-stage process** stimulates discussion and debate, and is applicable to consultation exercises with stakeholders and non-users. It can act as a checklist to explore possibilities and enable divergent thinking, in order to define *what really matters*, and how to bring heritage content to life. It allows anyone involved in the design process to emotionally connect with content themselves, enabling them to imagine what visitors *might* find compelling. This often involves identifying universally accessible and relevant themes and ideas, such as the importance of 'belonging' or 'innovation'. Far from dictating how visitors *should* feel, identifying emotional importance provides visitors with emotionally driven parameters in which to create their own meanings.

Inevitably, some elements of the Framework will be more relevant than others, depending on content, audience, budget and type of learning experience.

'Think of the Possible' case studies

To demonstrate how 'Think of the Possible' can be applied practically, two case studies can be found on pp.10–15, each inspired by Ashmolean Museum collections. Case study 1 is a planning exercise designed to show how the Framework could be used to interpret a single object in the context of a gallery session for two very different audiences. Case study 2 provides an example of how the Framework has been used to create a family trail interpreting a collection of objects. A paper trail format was chosen because it literally makes IE inspiration visible.

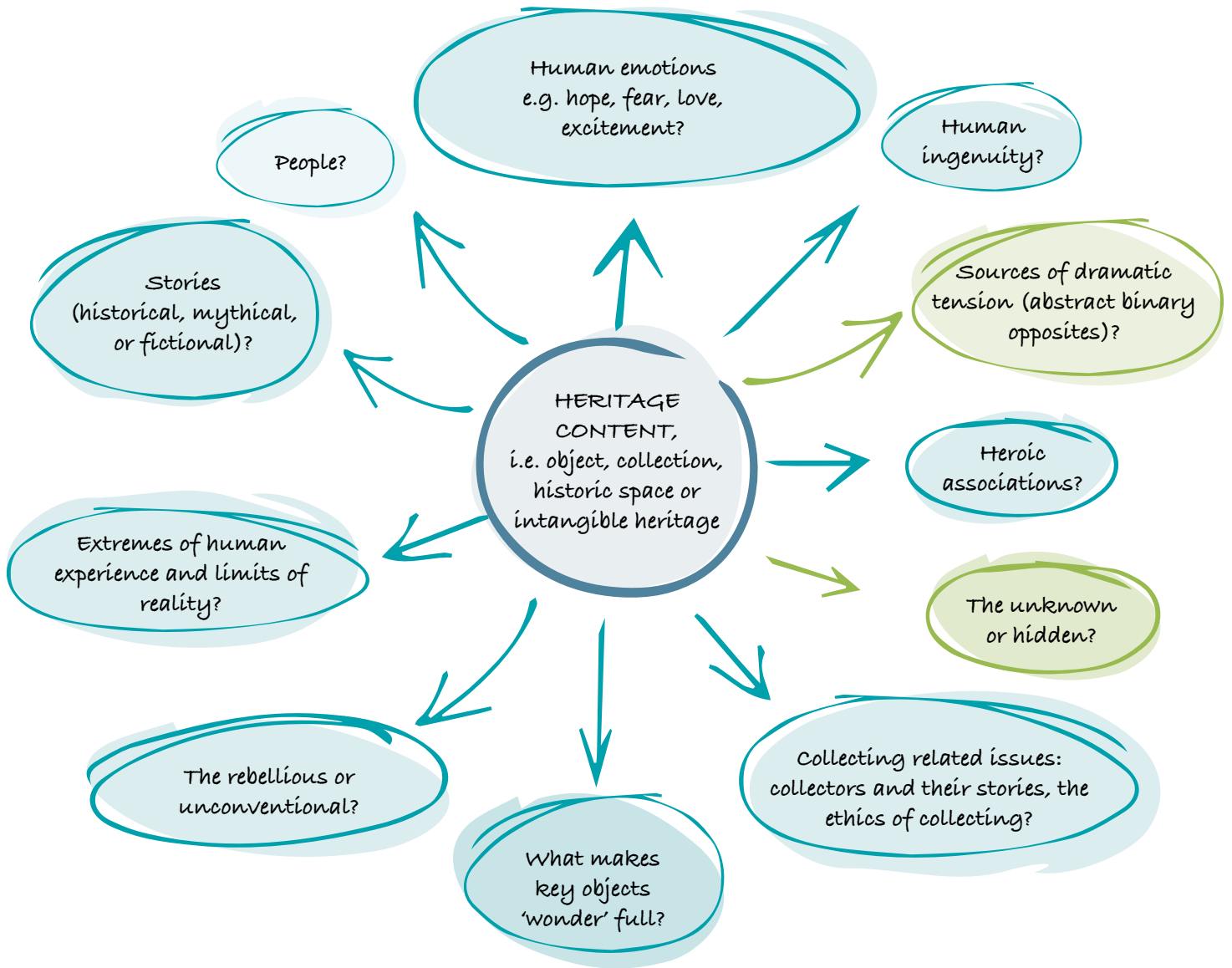
Re-visit the familiar

However familiar the tools, the process of unpacking heritage content and seeking out emotionally engaging interpretative approaches should not be dismissed as 'too obvious'. An 'IE way of thinking' also helps us recognise IE tools operating in broad cultural contexts – advertising is an interesting place to start. As in advertising, museums and heritage settings have limited time to seize the attention of visitors and encourage them to care. Why not use IE to *maximise* the opportunities of capturing visitors' imaginations, enabling more effective learning and a sense of 'the possible'?

Framework

STAGE I: Explore 'Why does it matter?'

- ✓ Use these 'thinking prompts' to mind-map relevant connections to content
- ✓ Refer to the tables opposite to help identify dramatic tension, heroic associations, and human emotions



✓ Identify imaginatively and emotionally compelling themes, ideas, questions, or arguments. These can be positive, difficult, controversial or contradictory

...and consider 'Who is it for?'

✓ Adapt themes, ideas, arguments or questions for your audience

Why does it matter?

And who is it for?

Framework

Some Abstract Binary Opposites

Identifying binary opposites will help locate dramatic tension. This 'black and white' starting point is intended to inspire the exploration of the shades of grey in between.

Believe Doubt	Linear Cyclic
Belonging Exclusion	Love Hate
Big Small	Never Forever
Chaos Order	Oppression Liberty
Create Destroy	Pain Pleasure
Difficult Easy	Peace War
Dominance Subordination	Perfect Flawed
End Renew	Powerful Weak
Equal Unequal	Pride Shame
Fair Unfair	Rational Illogical
Forgive Blame	Remembered Forgotten
Friends Enemies	Respect Disrespect
Hero Villain	Risk Taking Safety
Hot Cold	Sturdy Fragile
Identity Namelessness	Success Defeat
Impartial Biased	Survival Death
Ingenious Unimaginative	Truth False
Joy Sorrow	Victory Defeat
Kind Cruel	Visible Invisible
Life Death	Wealth Destitution
Light Dark	Win Lose

Some Heroic Qualities

Heroic qualities extend from the everyday to the extraordinary: the patience and perseverance of an unknown craftsman has as much value as the bravery of a famous warrior. Anti-heroic qualities should also be considered, i.e. the abuse of power.

Accountability Accuracy Acumen Adaptability
Altruism Attention to Detail Beauty Believing in Yourself Bravery Calm Caring Charity Collaboration
Compassion Concentration Courage Creativity Curiosity
 Dedication **Determination** Efficiency Encouragement
Enthusiasm Fairness Flexibility Foresight Forethought
Friendship Giving Generosity Hard Work Honesty
Humour Imagination Impartiality Independence
Ingenuity Innovation Insight Integrity Intelligence
 Justness **Kindness Love Loyalty Meticulousness Modesty**
 Organization **Patience Peaceful Perseverance Persistence**
Philanthropy Potency Power Reliability Resilience
 Resourcefulness Respect **Responsibility Reverence**
Saving Scholarship Self Esteem Selflessness
Self-sacrifice Sense of Community Sensitivity
 Steadfastness **Stewardship Strength Sustainability**
Teamwork Tenacity Thoroughness Thrift Understanding
Unselfishness Valour Wisdom

Drawn from IE lists of abstract binary opposites and heroic qualities.

For more information please visit: www.educationthatinspires.ca/tips-for-imaginative-educators and click on 'Find a source of dramatic tension' and 'Seek heroic qualities'.

Possible Emotions

Anger Acceptance Admiration Aggression Amazement Annoyance Anticipation Anxiety Apprehension
Awe Boredom Confusion Contentment Contempt Determination Despair Disapproval Disgust Ecstasy
Excitement Fear Grief Happiness Hope Inspiration Irritation Jealousy Joy Loathing Love Loneliness Misery
 Optimism **Outrage Peace Pride Sadness Serenity Shame Submission Surprise Remorse Terror Trust**

Framework

STAGE 2: Storify, humanise (and surprise?) and engage through the body

- ✓ Select relevant interpretative approaches that most powerfully communicate 'Why does it matter' themes and ideas

Storify

Tell Stories:

- Use live storytelling
- Storytelling in other media: film, audio, animation, projections, digital, comic-strip
- Construct narratives with connected objects
- Include anecdotes
- Evoke mental imagery with words: describe a moment in time in sensual language using the present tense.

Story-shape content (e.g. journalistic approach):

- Use attention grabbing headlines
- Layer content to build a story
- Summarise and raise questions

Create compelling beginnings:

- Use vivid or surprising imagery
- Set the scene: key objects, film, projections or music

Reveal dramatic tension:

- Express drama or conflict identified in content (in text, verbally) or wordlessly (lighting, mood, music)
- Explore the 'problem' or 'big question and possible 'answers'
- Acknowledge the unknown
- Explore the secret or hidden

Create an appropriate ending for audience:

- Offer a satisfying resolution
- End with ambiguity: no definite answers

Use metaphors:

- In text, verbally ('light bulb moment')
- Visually (image of a light bulb)

Use rhythmic language:

- Use poetic and rhythmic language (verbally, in text)
- Use repetition (particularly for younger audiences)

Integrate humour and playfulness:

- Tell jokes, use riddles and word play, and embrace silliness, spontaneity and playfulness (as appropriate)

Humanise (and surprise?)

Bring humanity of content to life:

- Tell human stories (historical or imagined)
- Use quotes: 'in their own words'
- Show images of connected people
- Provide visual context: a sense of place (maps, images, digital reconstructions, projections, immersive design)
- Integrate different voices and perspectives
- Invite empathy: role play, costumed interpretation, dressing up, digital interactives, through text, questions
- Explain or show human use of heritage

Reveal connected emotions:

- Reference emotion (verbally, in text) avoiding overly sensational language
- Invite and integrate emotional responses
- Express emotion through design, lighting, mood

Draw out heroic associations and reveal the unconventional or rebellious:

- Tell stories, use quotes and anecdotes that reveal and reference these associations
- Explore through role-play, games, curious facts, digital interactives, quizzes, verbally, in text and film

Illuminate wonder:

- Give the 'wonder-full' breathing space: through design, lighting, by focusing on key objects (consider extra layers of interpretation) and with questions, discussions, different perspectives, stories, explanations and interactivity

Highlight Ingenuity:

- Make human ingenuity visible: the process of making or problem solving (film, images, models, diagrams, stories) or reference in text

Reveal extremes and limits of human experience and reality:

- Integrate surprising and awe-inspiring facts (text, verbally, visually within design): extreme cultural differences, the oldest, the biggest, the strangest, cutting edge technology (think Guinness Book of Records)

Uncover and debate the human drive to 'collect':

- Humanise collectors (tell their stories). Highlight and debate associated ethical and decolonisation related issues

Engage through the body

Include multi-sensory experiences:

- Object handling (replicas, props, different textured materials)
- Smells
- Sound (music, spoken word, sound effects)
- Tasting

Integrate tangible playful activities and gallery interactives:

- Puzzles, games, models
- Board and construction games, musical instruments, costumes

Use visually stimulating resources, interactives and environments:

- Play with visual formats: images, diagrams, maps, digital interactives
- Prioritise good design
- Use lighting and immersive design to communicate historical context and mood

Involve Movement:

- Find opportunities for dance, movement, gesture and music
- Involve actions, e.g., lifting the flap, opening drawers, crouching down to discover, or looking up in unexpected places

Prioritise physical comfort:

- Provide comfortable seating and aim to create sufficient space for visitors to move, explore and engage: this will make them more receptive to learning.

These sets of interrelating interpretative approaches are equally important. They should be used in combination with each other, and adapted to the learning and access needs of your audience.

Framework

STAGE 3: Consider all opportunities for audience participation

- ✓ **Check audience participation is built-in to the design of the learning experience**
Multi-sensory experiences (e.g., object handling), tangible interactivity (puzzles, games), digital interactivity, movement, role play, dressing up (see Stage 2) and opportunities for creative response to heritage (art, crafts, creative writing, music)
- ✓ **Create physical space for audience reflection and response**
Seating areas, tables, immersive spaces, dedicated areas for visitor response
- ✓ **Make time for audience to express views, feelings and opinions and encourage debate: *make this visible where possible***
Activities within learning experiences, i.e., discussion time, quizzes and Q&A (and as part of feedback process) and opportunities to respond and interact beyond visit (on-line forums, via social media)

STAGE 4: Assess learning via imaginative and emotional engagement (applicable to formative and summative assessment phases)

- ✓ **Assess response to 'Why does it matter?' themes and ideas**
Investigate 'What did you care about the most/ find most memorable/relevant?' to discover any correlations with themes and ideas identified in 'Why does it matter' (Stage 1)
- ✓ **Select assessment method compatible with audience and type, mood and scale of learning experience**
Ranging from consultations, questionnaires and interviews to games and post-it notes
- ✓ **Ask emotion-led questions when eliciting feedback**
'What was the most exciting/enjoyable part of this experience?', 'Which fact/activity/display was the most boring?'
- ✓ **Use IE tools to inspire visitor activities that reveal extent of emotional engagement**
Write a story, play a game (quiz, puzzles), express response through movement or music
- ✓ **Observe participants**
Look for clues of emotional engagement in body language and facial expressions (as appropriate and depending on audience and learning styles)
- ✓ **Ensure practitioner/co-creator reflection time is integrated into planning process**
What worked, what didn't, what could be improved?

Case study 1 (planning exercise)

STAGE I: Why does it matter?

Stories? Association with rain dragon stories from Chinese and Japanese mythology. How does the dragon connect to Buddhist drum (also known as wooden fish)? Drum used during Buddhist chanting and to keep monks awake. Is the dragon protecting the drum? Dragon has a lugubrious, serious, and yet comic expression - good story potential. Connection to family memoir *Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010) by Edmund de Waal

Ingenuity? Ingenuity and skill of craftsman: detailed carving of horn, smooth to touch (so as not to snag kimono silk), and ability to create such a tiny characterful item. Problem-solving dimension of the system of using netsuke on kimonos. Emotions? Pride and pleasure of original owner and later collectors.

People? An unknown craftsman made this, although netsuke are often signed. Was it made for a Japanese merchant or a Western collector? Was it used as a toggle, or collected from the start to be admired? The only named associated person is Sir Herbert Ingram, the collector who gave it (along with many other objects) to the Ashmolean in 1956.

Content: Japanese netsuke (netsuke) in the form of a rain dragon coiled around a mokugyō, a Buddhist percussion instrument. Staghorn. Made in Tokyo. c. 1880. Size: 3.1 x 4.3 x 4 cm



Netsuke are small belt toggles, used by men in Japan during the Edo period (1615–1868) to attach purses or containers to the sash of their Kimonos. Popular with the merchant class who were banned from displaying wealth openly and had no political power. Instead, they invested in arts, fashion and a luxurious life style. Netsuke are inspired by broad themes including legends, folklore, history, animals, mythology and political satire.

Extremes of experience and limits of reality? Tiny object, opposite of how we imagine mighty dragons. Fantastical, magical thinking connected to dragon stories and their significance. Did this netsuke also act as talisman to bring good fortune?

Binary opposites/dramatic tension? Big/Small: a tiny object offering a significant insight into Japanese culture. Invisible/visible: a small item that is easy to hide away, but is intended to be seen. Noise/Silence of object: the drum makes us imagine noise, but the object is silent. Fantasy/Reality: a fantasy beast with spiritual meaning, but a practical everyday item, associated with the living day to day practice of Buddhism.

Heroic associations? Patience, concentration, attention to detail and creativity of craftsman. Heroism of protective dragon. Generosity of Ingram who gave netsuke to Ashmolean

Wonder-full ness? For all the reasons listed: a mini masterpiece - exquisite, fascinating yet functional.

Collecting issues? Netsuke have been avidly collected, particularly since Japan opened to the West in 1853. What cultural impact has this had? Netsuke remain objects of desire - but why? Links to the complex story of Western fascination with Japanese culture and the 'exotic' and the ongoing debate in museums about cultural appreciation vs cultural appropriation.

Rebellious or unconventional? Not so relevant to this netsuke, but netsuke artists often pushed boundaries and took risks in terms of a subversive choice of subject (e.g., erotic, satirical).

The unknown? How did Sir Herbert Ingram acquire this netsuke? What is the meaning of the dragon and the Buddhist drum?

- ✓ **It is a window into a world:** despite its size, this miniature treasure (along with other *netsuke*) reveals so much about Japanese aesthetics and culture during the Edo period
- ✓ **It reminds us small things matter:** everyday art on a small scale – beautiful and practical
- ✓ **It makes us curious about dragons and associated stories:** how does the rain dragon connect to Japanese Buddhism? What's the story?
- ✓ **It is an object of desire:** this netsuke prompts us to question why netsuke are so desirable, and understand the drive to collect them

Why does it matter?
Identify emotionally compelling themes, ideas, and questions

1. PROPOSED GALLERY ACTIVITY FOR EARLY YEARS (3–5)

The tiny toggle dragon from Japan

STAGE 1: Adapted themes and ideas

- ✓ This tiny dragon tells us that the Japanese love small, beautiful useful things
- ✓ This dragon helps us play and tell stories about Japanese dragons

STAGE 2 AND 3:

✓ Selected Interpretative approaches and Participation

Compelling beginning: a replica animal *netsuke* whispering in the session leader's pocket: "*Shh, I'm a secret netsuke and have a dragon friend who lives here*" (show enlarged image of dragon). Explain how he was used in Japan – how owners wanted to hide how special he was, but also show him off. **Multi-sensory experience:** handle replica *netsuke* and kimono. See how the toggle fastens the purse to the sash. Show photograph of man in kimono with *netsuke* in use. Feel how smooth it is to keep kimono from being torn. **Movement, music and role play:** show pictures of other animal *netsuke*. Which will you be? Pretend to be that animal, but all curled up and tucked in, as smooth as possible. Play 'guess who' game. Now be a dragon protecting your drum (listen to the sound of the drum being played). **Storytelling:** tell a short story/sing a song about a Japanese rain dragon and his drum. **Ending:** conclude with the *netsuke* going back into your pocket. "*Shh, can you keep me a secret?*" Could also clay model 3D *netsuke* to enhance learning experience, if access to studio space.

STAGE 4: Assessment

- ✓ **Discussion/game:** chat about what is wonderful about being small (like a *netsuke*). Roar like happy dragon if you've had fun! Sigh like a sad dragon if you didn't.
- ✓ **Practitioner/co-creator reflection** on outcomes.

2. PROPOSED GALLERY TALK FOR ADULTS

Netsuke: objects of desire

STAGE 1: Adapted themes and ideas

- ✓ *Netsuke* as objects of desire – why?
- ✓ *Netsuke* as windows into Japanese culture: Rain Dragon as focus object.

STAGE 2 AND 3:

✓ Selected Interpretative approaches and Participation

Compelling beginning (evoking mental imagery with words): describe moment in present tense, before hammer goes down on sale of *netsuke* for vast sum: tension, hot room, screen flickering with bids. **Multi-sensory experience:** pass replica *netsuke* around, explain function (use image of *netsuke* and kimono) highlight sensual appeal. Explore *netsuke* collection. Which ones intrigue you? **Dramatic tension:** how can such tiny objects pack such a cultural punch? Why so coveted and collected? Use Rain dragon as case study 'window into a world of culture' object: discuss history of *netsuke*, possible meanings, and explore broader themes of *netsuke* (pick out the **most striking/unusual** on display). Draw out **heroism of craftsmanship and illuminate wonder:** show short film (on iPads) of master *netsuke* maker carving *netsuke* i.e. **visually stimulating resource.** **Humanise collector:** who was Ingram? What else did he give to the Ashmolean, his interests etc. Example of Western collector fascinated by Japan. **Reflective ending:** not hard to understand why *netsuke* are so desirable, sum up. Involve visitors in discussion about collecting in this context, stress **ambiguity of issues.**

STAGE 4: Assessment

- ✓ **Discussion:** which *netsuke* would you take home if you could, and why? This should indicate level of emotional and imaginative engagement.
- ✓ **Practitioner/co-creator reflection** on outcomes.

Case study 2 (family trail)

STAGE I: Why does it matter?

Wonder-fulness of key objects selected? Zeus, huge, powerful, King of the Gods, romance that the original was found under the sea; gold necklace of acorns extraordinary skill of jeweller; Shoe maker pot gives an unusual and vivid insight into everyday life in Ancient Greece.

People and Stories? Multiple associations with people, mythical and historical, and their stories in the gallery, e.g., Copy of sculpture of Zeus, Homer (sculpted head), Athena (cup), Nike (series of pots), Odysseus and Theseus (pots). Greek myths and acts of heroism.

Content: a selection of objects from the Greece Gallery, Ashmolean



This family trail activity was inspired by the Ashmolean's ancient Greek collection. The process of creating the trail involved identifying key objects with the most potential for engaging children and their families, and which offered 'ways in' to exploring life in ancient Greece. These included a variety of pots, grave goods, and sculptures.

Human emotions and ingenuity? Love and fear of the gods, hope for victory in war and sport, excitement inherent in drama of Greek myths and acts of heroism. Great ingenuity shown in terms of craftsmanship throughout.

Heroic associations? Creativity and skill of craftspeople. Courage, strength and determination of Olympians and soldiers on the battle field. Power, wisdom and resourcefulness of mythical gods and heroes. Imagination and creativity of Homer.

Abstract binary opposites? War/Peace, Hero/Villain; Success/Defeat, Danger/Safety. Rich dramatic potential as mythical connections to selected objects were so strong. Identifying binaries made this clear and provided parameters for interpreting content.

Rebellious or unconventional? Strains of rebellion run through much of Greek myth and Classical thought and literature. Homer's Odysseus is a true rebel, unafraid to defy and challenge the might of the gods.

The unknown? In the context of ancient Greece, so much unknown...

Extremes of experience and limits of reality? Greek myths are full of extremes - the trials and tribulations of gods and heroes reflecting those of humankind. Extreme scale of Zeus and 'epic' dimensions of Homer's Odyssey.

Collecting issues? Relevant and complex. How were these objects collected? Should they be in British museums or repatriated? Issue not addressed in the context of this trail.

Why does it matter?

Identify emotionally compelling themes ideas, and questions

- ✓ This selection of ancient objects reveal 'what really mattered' to people living in ancient Greece: a fascination with their gods; love of sport, theatre and hunting; the importance of warfare and social order
- ✓ The objects are bursting with amazing stories and imaginative energy: these myths remain as fresh, dramatic, exciting and relevant as ever
- ✓ This was a culture of heroes - we find heroism and heroic qualities reflected everywhere: from unknown hardworking craftspeople to heroic superstars such as Theseus and Odysseus and sporting champions
- ✓ Ancient objects like these raise multiple questions, not all of them comfortable: how were they acquired, and in what circumstances? What are the ethical and political issues? How should museums deal with this?

This trail was designed for children aged 6+ and their families. Themes and ideas identified for this audience:

- ✓ Drama and excitement of an ancient culture that celebrated stories, gods and heroes in every aspect of life
- ✓ An exploration of heroism, and the idea that this can be expressed in many different ways

Who is it for?
Adapt compelling themes ideas, arguments or questions for your audience

STAGE 2 AND 3:

✓ Selected Interpretative approaches and Participation

Family trails are all about **participation**. The challenge is ensuring the right type of activity matches the right object. Interpretative approaches selected: **playful activities** throughout, **movement (mime)**, drawing out **heroic associations**, and using these and **abstract binary opposites** as inspiration for the **big question** 'What kind of Hero would you be?' Highlighting **extremes and limits of experience** and **story-shaping** with an appropriate ending. Use of **humour**.

See annotated version of 'Heroes of Ancient Greece' (pp.14–15) which highlights these approaches. To download trail: <https://www.ashmolean.org/learning-resource-family-trails>

STAGE 4: Assessment

- ✓ Verbal feedback and evidence from questionnaires when testing the trail positive. High levels of enjoyment indicated: 8 out of 11 families who completed questionnaire rated the trail 5/5. All indicated it made them discuss and look closely at objects. Wide spread of opinion regarding favourite activity. "Perfect for a 7-year old who is very interested in gods and heroes".

Practitioner reflection: this continues to be one of our most popular trails, though one family has since indicated it is not dyslexia friendly. We plan to re-design the trail to make it more broadly accessible.

TIME TRAVELLER TRAILS SUITABLE FOR AGES **6+**

HEROES OF ANCIENT GREECE

Go to gallery 16, ground floor

Let's travel back over 2,500 years to ancient Greece, and meet some heroes. From the gods and adventurers, to the brilliant brains and clever craftspeople of the age, they were all heroes in different ways.

WHAT KIND OF HERO WOULD YOU BE?

1 Ruler of the Universe?
Find this sculpture 

This is a copy of a sculpture found under the sea, thought to be Zeus, father of gods and humans and supreme ruler of the universe!

He was once holding his famous weapon, now lost. **What do you think it was?**

 A TRIDENT  A THUNDERBOLT  A SPEAR

Now stand like a god! Copy Zeus's powerful pose

2 The Wisest of all?
Find this goddess on a pot in the 'Gods and Goddesses' case.

This is Athena, goddess of war and wisdom. She helped many gods and people out of trouble. **What is she holding?**

Look in the case behind you. Can you find a cup decorated with a wise bird?
The owl is Athena's symbol. She was patron goddess of Athens. **Finish this picture:**

3 Sporting Champion?
Find the 'Theatre and Athletics' case

Nike, the winged goddess of Victory flew around bringing victory to champions in sport and theatre and on the battlefield.

Nike is flitting about on objects in this case and the case behind you, can you track her down?

Now choose a sport on a pot and MIME it in slow motion. Can your family guess which sport this is?

ASHMOLEAN Enjoy the objects on display but please don't touch

Participation: In the format of an object 'hunt' the trail aims to actively engage children and their families by encouraging them to look carefully at objects and take part in a variety of activities.

Visually stimulating: We worked with a graphic designer to make visual sense of trail content.

Heroic associations: This introduction flags up the many different ways of being heroic (which became the structuring device of the trail) while connecting the idea of 'the heroic' to Greek culture.

Dramatic tension, story shaping (compelling beginning): Exploring abstract binary opposites and heroic associations helped identify the purpose of this activity, i.e. the big question, and gives an epic 'feel' to the beginning of the trail.

Extremes and limits: Zeus is as extreme a god as you can get in terms of the scale of his power. This dictated the wording: 'supreme ruler of the universe!'

Movement: Encouraging children to adopt a 'power stance' and physicalise the feeling of power is a good example of matching the heroic 'why it matters' with an appropriate activity.

Heroic associations: This drawing activity was chosen to express the slower, more meditative feel of 'wisdom'.

Extremes of reality and playfulness: We wanted to make the most of the idea that Nike flies around bringing victory, much aided here by the lively design.

Movement (mime): An obvious interpretative approach to express the physical theme of sport.

4 Super skilled creative?

Find this pot in a case on its own.

What is the craftsman doing?

- MAKING SHOES CUTTING TOENAILS
 MAKING A NECKLACE



Clever craftspeople made the objects in this gallery. We don't know their names but they made beautiful and useful things that tell us about life in ancient Greece.



Find these objects and give each a skill rating out of 5 (1 for low skills, 5 for top skills). Then circle your favourite.

5 Clever like Odysseus?

Find this hero in the 'Heroes and Myth' case.

This is Odysseus, the brave and cunning hero of a famous story called 'The Odyssey'. He had many adventures in his quest to get home to his wife Penelope.

He is surfing on 2 jars across the sea. Something in the sky is helping him.

What is it?



Can you help him get home even quicker? Draw in a boat, surf board or whatever you like!

Peek round the back of the pot – what can you see?

Humour: Too good an opportunity to miss as it really looks as though the shoemaker is cutting his customer's toe nails!

Extremes and limits: Asking children to 'rate' these objects seemed like a good way of expressing extremes, i.e., the 'most' skilled, the 'least' skilled.

Storytelling: Even though it was impossible to 'tell a story' (especially the entire 'Odyssey'), this brief story synopsis is designed to express a sense of story.

Playfulness, humour: The image of Odysseus is so lively and full of energy and movement, this playful activity referencing speedy travel is a good match.

6 Danger Defeater?

Find this hero (in the same case) from a famous Greek myth. What is he doing?



If you were a hero in a story, what dangers would you defeat?

7 Totally epic storyteller?

Find this head of a man

This is Homer, a famous storyteller and poet. He wrote epic adventures called 'The Odyssey' and the 'The Iliad'.



Time to decide what kind of hero you'd like to be. Select your favourite, and share this with your family, or whisper it to Homer....



- RULER OF THE UNIVERSE...bit ambitious, but why not!
 THE WISEST OF ALL
 SPORTING CHAMPION
 SUPER SKILLED CREATIVE
 CLEVER LIKE ODYSSEUS
 DANGER DEFEATER
 TOTALLY EPIC STORYTELLER

Well done – you have found out about different kinds of heroes in ancient Greece. May your life ahead be heroic!

Dramatic tension: Involving children in exploration of drama inherent in stories (danger/safety and Success/Defeat) by imagining their own heroic role.

Participation and satisfying resolution: An opportunity for children to 'answer' the question themselves, having explored the options.



Practical exercises: warm up your 'IE way of thinking'

- ✓ Select a heritage 'item' and try the mind-mapping exercise in Stage 1 of the Framework (p6). Which 'thinking prompts' were relevant? Did you find 'Why does it matter' themes and ideas easy to identify?
- ✓ Study IE toolkits on p.4. Actively seek out IE tools operating within cultural and learning contexts.
- ✓ Take Stage 2 of the Framework (p.8) with you on your next museum visit. Look for and critique interpretative approaches.

Links to CIRCE and IE resources



For more information about CIRCE (Centre for Imagination, Research, Culture and Education) please visit www.circsfu.ca. A wealth of information about the theory of IE, Kieran Egan's publications and associated thinking and practice can be found on www.educationthatinspires.ca.



How to get involved

All feedback is welcome. Advice and support are available on request from Jane Cockcroft at the Ashmolean Museum, together with other case studies. There is still enormous scope for further exploration and research; for example, individual IE tools could be the focus of investigation.

Please send any 'Think of the Possible' inspired questions, ideas, comments or case studies (so these can be collated and shared) to:

 jane.cockcroft@ashmus.ox.ac.uk
 [@cockcroft_jane](https://twitter.com/cockcroft_jane)

It would be helpful to know about:

- ✓ Your experience of using the Framework: what worked, what didn't?
- ✓ Audience impact: evidence that demonstrates learning via imaginative and emotional engagement

You may also like to join CIRCE's Facebook discussion page and contribute to the dialogue about the role of the imagination in museums and heritage settings. Please visit

www.circsfu.ca/2019/01/10/webinar-ie-learning-in-museums-cultural-contexts and request to join the closed group on Facebook. Please mention 'Think of the Possible'.